

## BNP set to reunify

FROM PAGE 1  
 even before Khaleda's arrest on September 3 last year.

Minutes before being arrested Khaleda expelled Bhuiyan from the party appointing Khandaker Delwar Hossain as the secretary general in his place.

"We had a cordial talk with Madam," Mahub told The Daily Star last night and hoped that the party will be reunited under the leadership of the chairperson, who was released from detention more than a year into her arrest.

"She wanted to know many things from me while we also informed her about the latest political situation," he added.

Maj (ret) Hafizuddin Ahmed, who was also very vocal for 'reforms', gave in to Khaleda's leadership yesterday as well, by recognising Delwar as the party's secretary general.

Khaleda will preside over today's standing committee meeting scheduled to be held in the party's central office in Naya Pallan of the capital at 3:00pm. The meeting will be the first of its kind since January last year.

Sources in BNP said the meeting will discuss the government's planned move to bring two former premiers, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina to a table, who are known to be political archrivals, and both of whom were detained by the military backed caretaker government on several graft charges.

Nine of the 15-member standing committee will meet today as Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan is still expelled from the party and two other members Moudud Ahmed and Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain are still in detention, while three other posts have been vacant for a long time.

The organisational state of the party, the country's latest political situation, reforms, and divisions in the party are expected to be discussed in the meeting," Lt Gen (ret) Mahubur Rahman told The Daily Star.

He said dialogues with the EC and the upcoming elections will also be discussed, adding he was asked to attend the meeting today.

The so-called reformists in the party became very active after Khaleda's arrest. They organised a controversial meeting of the policymaking standing committee in Saifur's residence on October 29 last year where the former finance minister was nominated as the acting chairman of the party while Hafizuddin was nominated as the acting secretary general, bypassing Khaleda and her appointed secretary general Delwar, and sparking the factional feud.

Seven out of 12 members of the standing committee were present in that meeting.

The move split BNP in two, with Delwar-led faction taking the EC to court after the commission had invited Hafizuddin to the electoral dialogues in a letter addressing him as the acting secretary general.

Soon with the emergence of Hamman Shah at the forefront, apparently leading yet another faction, BNP, one of the largest political parties in the country, found itself in a very precarious position.

Before leaving the country for treatment on May 7 this year, Saifur suddenly relinquished the leadership of his own faction, signalling fading of the influence of so-called reformist camp.

Now, Maj Hafizuddin also thinks that the October 29 decision of the controversial standing committee meeting was wrong.

"There is no dispute about her leadership. BNP was united under the leadership of Khaleda Zia and it will remain so," Hafiz told reporters in his residence yesterday, adding that he and his followers finally came to accept the leadership of Khaleda nominated secretary general.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan also hailed Khaleda's release and is expected to get reinstated in the party soon. His fate in the party will be discussed in today's meeting.

"The issue of Mannan Bhuiyan will be a crucial agenda item in the meeting," said a senior BNP leader, on condition of anonymity.

Talking to reporters in his residence, Bhuiyan expressed his elation over Khaleda's release. "The people were expecting her release. I express my gratitude to the almighty for her release, which will make the party stronger," he said.

Four lawyers of Khaleda also met her yesterday. Salaudun Quader Chowdhury, who was parliamentary affairs adviser to Khaleda during her last premiership, also met her.

Apart from the meetings, she also talked to many party leaders and well wishers who called her from many places in the country and from abroad," said one of Khaleda's lawyers.

After being released, Khaleda returned to her Shaheed Moinul Road residence in Dhaka Cantonment on Thursday night from where she had been arrested by the joint forces more than a year ago.

The BNP chief also talked to her sons Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko over the phone and enquired about their health conditions.

Tarique, who was released on bail on September 3, left the country on Thursday. He is expected to be admitted to a hospital in London soon.

Koko is now undergoing treatment in Bangkok.

Khaleda and her sons are facing a number of corruption and extortion charges.

## Fazle Abed

FROM PAGE 1  
 prestigious award of the Synergos Institute.

The award will be given on September 23 in New York at an event called "University for a Night", a unique annual gathering of leaders from business, government, civil society and philanthropy.

Synergos confers the David Rockefeller Bridging Leadership Award each year on persons and organisations who exemplify "what the evening stands for - working together for the common good."

The first such honouree was David Rockefeller, for whom the award is named.

Last year, the award went to former South Africa president Nelson Mandela and Bill Gates, Melinda French Gates and William H Gates Sr, co-chairs of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Synergos is an independent non-profit organisation dedicated to the development of effective, sustainable and locally-based solutions to poverty. Working with its partners, Synergos mobilise resources and bridge social and economic divides to reduce poverty and increase equity around the world.

## Travel chaos

FROM PAGE 16  
 a letter telling us what had happened," said Julian Castle, who with his wife Marion had booked flights with XL for a two-week holiday in Florida.

"We've been queuing up for about two hours and have been told we can get other flights but we'll have to pay 695 pounds (870 euros, 1,230 dollars) each," he added.

Administrators have been called in to see whether the company can be saved from total bankruptcy.

Britain's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said the XL collapse was probably the biggest holiday operator failure for 20 years. The company had operated flights to more than 50 destinations in Europe, the United States and Africa.

The CAA said it would bring back people already on holiday who had been left without return flights.

Customers queuing at Gatwick - XL's main departure point for package holidays - had no idea of XL's collapse until they were informed by airport officials.

Graham White, 27, an estate agent from London, said: "We didn't find out about it until we got here. I'm pretty annoyed."

Meanwhile there were similar frustrations at London's St Pancras station, the British terminus for trains travelling through the Channel Tunnel to France and Belgium.

"I heard the announcement in the Tube this morning that there was no service. When I heard it I didn't believe it," said Lithuanian Katia Nazmutdinova, 25, who was planning to travel to Paris for a trade show.

"They don't know if the service will be available tomorrow but the thing is, even if I come tomorrow I don't think I'm going to be able to use their train because I think all the tickets will be sold out."

The fire erupted Thursday afternoon on a freight train about five kilometres (three miles) from the French end of the tunnel, forcing the evacuation of some 30 people, mostly truckers.

While the blaze was rapidly brought under control, British and French firefighters battled all night to finally extinguish it.

Many passengers were forced to spend an extra night in London or Paris Thursday as flights between the two cities quickly became fully booked, while ferries were also in heavy demand.

To help matters, some bus services in London were facing disruption due to a strike by drivers and other staff over a payrow.

Members of Unite union at firms run by the first transport group were on strike for 48 hours, affecting buses in the east and the west of the British capital.

## Rab deployed

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 launch terminal within a few days.

Rab officials said similar steps will be taken at Mohakhali bus terminal after ramadan 15 when many will start leaving the capital for home.

Meanwhile, passengers at Sayedabad bus terminal said transport workers tugged at their luggage in a bid to get them into buses. But the transport workers showed restraints after Rab members were deployed at the terminal.

The passengers said traffic jam occurs regularly at the terminal gate as the drivers stop buses there to get passengers.

"If we receive any allegations of collecting extra fares or passenger harassment we shall take tough actions against the persons responsible," said in-charge of the Rab control room Deputy Assistant Director Azizur Rahman.

Bus drivers yesterday refrained from waiting at the terminal gate after the deployment of Rab members.

Nurul Islam, a bus driver, said, "We stop buses at the terminal gate, for around 10 minutes to get passengers. Now our income has dropped as we are not allowed to stop buses at the gate."

Asked whether they have to pay extortion money to criminals or transport association leaders, Nurul said such practices stopped after the present caretaker government took over.

## Aman targets

FROM PAGE 1  
 waterlogged in Sirajganj, destroying the prospect of about 2,500 tonnes of rice.

Khandaker Hasibur Rahman, the agriculture extension department's deputy director in the district, estimated the loss at Tk 7.50 crore.

## RMC closed

FROM PAGE 1  
 Rashedul Islam, Sourav Das, Harun-ur-Rashid, Zakaria Habib, Kamruzzaman, Zahedul Islam, Soheland Manjurul Karim.

Meanwhile, the Rajshahi University (RU) Syndicate at its meeting on Thursday night decided to reopen the university on October 12.

Earlier on August 20, the RU authorities closed the university for an indefinite period following a violent clash between the students and local traders that left 60 people, including teachers, students and policemen, injured.

The RU residential halls will reopen on October 11, sources said.

## Khaleda agrees to drop

FROM PAGE 1  
 ensure post-election stability.

Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman led the advisers to the talks that began at 9:30pm. The other members of the delegation were LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal, Communications Adviser Ghulam Quader and Law adviser Hassan Arif.

During over two-hour meeting, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed called Khaleda and briefed her about the overall goals of this government. The conversation lasted 10 minutes.

Zillur said the BNP chief asked Fakhruddin to withdraw the state of emergency without delay and hold the ninth parliamentary election before upazilla polls.

The CA and the BNP chairperson agreed to work in unison towards a peaceful and credible national election by December, he added.

Later, at a news briefing at an Old DOHS community centre, the advisers said they discussed a number of issues including the possibility of formal talks between the government and BNP and ways to ensure a level playing field for the general election.

## Saudi ban on visas

FROM PAGE 1  
 A huge number of Bangladeshi schoolchildren, who are about to turn 18, are facing possible deportation, the agent said.

"This is a big problem facing Bangladeshi families living in the kingdom," he added saying the problem is acute for doctors, engineers and accountants, who could afford to bring their children to there.

Saudi immigration rule states that children of immigrant workers may stay in the kingdom on separate residency permits after turning 18, but their parents must sponsor them.

Negative media coverage about Bangladeshis being involved in criminal activities there might be a reason for the backlash, the recruiting agent said.

A group of Saudis already launched a website titled 'No to Corruption', campaigning to stop recruiting Bangladeshis workers.

The website in Arabic attracted more than 80,000 hits in two weeks, Arab News reported on February 12 this year.

The launch of the website was prompted by an increase in the number of crimes committed by Bangladeshis there, said one of the initiators of the campaign.

Experts however, said singling out any particular nationality for punishment for crimes that can be committed by anyone anywhere, is neither rational nor acceptable.

While Bangladeshi workers in job categories other than domestic and agricultural are continuing to arrive in the kingdom, stay of those already there including doctors and nurses is being denied uncertain as they are getting transfers of sponsorship, and their children aged 18 and over are being denied renewal of residency permits, Waheedur said.

When parents are applying for renewal of residency permits for their children aged 18 years and over, the authorities are not giving extensions, he added saying several families had to send their children back to Bangladesh.

"The embassy receives several calls everyday from our workers about the refusal to allow sponsorship transfers even in professional job categories such as doctors and nurses," he said.

Thousands of Bangladeshi workers were denied sponsorship transfers, Waheedur went on adding the embassy took up the matter with the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was awaiting a response.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest foreign employer of immigrant Bangladeshi workers, which currently employ around 18 lakh Bangladeshi expatriates.

CA on polls  
 FROM PAGE 16  
 relax it for the purpose of the election as much as necessary."

The CA said China is a very important development partner of Bangladesh as bilateral cooperation has been expanded in many fields. He expected that his visit would further strengthen the cordial friendship between the two countries.

"China has been assisting us in economic growth," said the CA, who is going to attend the closing ceremony of Beijing Para Olympic and to meet Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.

China's contribution to the infrastructure sector is evident, he said, noting the six friendship bridges and the Bangladesh-China friendship Conference Centre in the capital.

The CA expected closer economic cooperation with China and more Chinese investment. "I hope my visit will strengthen economic cooperation in different fields and trade between the two countries, and improve and increase Chinese investment in Bangladesh," he said.

"We've been good friends and we'll continue to remain good friends in the future and let the bonds of friendship flourish in the future," The CA said.

Tarique in London  
 FROM PAGE 1  
 Syed Shafiquzzaman, and physician Dr Kazi Mazharul Islam Dolon were accompanying him.

During the stopover in Dubai, Tarique had an injection to relieve the backache that had dogged him throughout his 18-month detention on graft charges.

He was expected to be admitted to a London hospital last night or Monday.

BNP's UK chapter chief Kamar Uddin and some 100 leaders and workers gathered at Gatwick to welcome Tarique and his family.

Besides, a large number of journalists had been waiting at the airport, but failed to get up close to Tarique, Syed Nahas Pasha, editor-in-chief of London-based Bangla weekly Janamat, told The Daily Star over phone.

He added that BNP leaders there were staying mum about precise location of the house where Tarique is staying.

"He was exhausted by the long journey from Dhaka to London," Pasha quoted UK BNP's General Secretary Abdul Malek as saying.

Replied to a query, he said they were working to get Hasina and Khaleda to sit down and discuss ways to take the country forward.

He quoted Khaleda as saying, "There could be competition between political parties, but they must cooperate with the government in the interests of the country."

Heads of BNP and AL have not met and talked to each other for more than a decade, and many consider the bitter relations between the two as main obstacle to political stability in the country.

Asked if Khaleda would be able to contest the election, Zillur replied, "It's a premature question. The Election Commission is the authority to deal with the issue."

Earlier on June 11, advisers held talks with Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence in Dhanmondi, hours after her release on executive orders. During that meeting too the CA called the AL chief.

"We have talked about how to get rid of those who have brought politics into disrepute," added the adviser.

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## Thai ruling party

FROM PAGE 16  
 "We have come to a resolution that since the coalition partners and some of the party members do not agree with appointing Samak, the party would have to pick someone else, said party spokesman Kuthep Saikrajang.

The National newspaper, quoting an unidentified source, said on its Web site that Samak had agreed to withdraw from the race and might even quit the party.

The surprise decision was a clear sign that Samak is seen by the ruling party as unreliable.

He is the focus of massive protests by an anti-government group, the People's Alliance for Democracy, whose occupation of the Government House has increased fears of instability, economic chaos and even a military coup.

Kuthep said the party has shortlisted three candidates to replace Samak acting Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, Justice Minister Somporn Amornwiwat and Finance Minister Surapong Seubwonglee.

He did not say the party will decide on the final candidate to contest the vote in Parliament. There was also no immediate word from the coalition partners but they are likely to accept anyone as long as it was not Samak.

Samak, a coarse politician who has antagonized virtually every Thai institution including the military and the media, has become one of the most divisive characters in Thai politics.

His troubles began soon after he took office in February when the People's Alliance for Democracy made up of the urban elite began protesting his appointment, saying he was manipulating illiterate rural voters.

Thousands of alliance members stormed and occupied the Government House on Aug 26. They say they will not leave until it is clear that Samak or his cronies will not return to office. They did not immediately comment on the latest development.

Somchai, the acting prime minister, said a state of emergency in Bangkok will not be lifted until the protesters leave the Government House, which houses the prime minister's office.

The protesters call Samak a pawn of disgraced former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted in a military coup following massive street protests they led in 2006. It was Thailand's 18th coup since the country became a constitutional monarchy in 1932.

The People's Power Party has 233 lawmakers in the 480-seat Parliament, but 10 are disqualified from voting, leaving it 18 short of a majority. The other five parties in the coalition control 83 seats, while the opposition Democrat Party has 164 seats.

The parliament tried to convene earlier Friday to elect Samak's replacement but had to be adjourned after the session was boycotted by the coalition partners.

Opposition Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva said "it's time to get the country out of its crisis, and to do that we need leaders with a fresh attitude."

## BSF kills one

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 Panchibhi upazila in Joyprhat that left an Indian national wounded.

The injured was identified as Babu Mondal, 32, son of Kayam Uddin of Dumuril under Hilli of South Dinajpur, India.

Officials of BDR 29 Battalion said a BDR patrol team rushed Babu to Joyprhat Sadar Hospital as he received severe bullet injuries. Doctors said he was in a critical condition.

BDR officials said BSF personnel of 89 Mitharupur camp fired at least 10 bullets towards Bangladesh territory without provocation. They claimed this left Babu injured as he was working on his cropland 400 metres inside Indian territory. BDR officials said injured Babu came into Bangladesh territory fearing more gunfire from BSF and seeking cover.

BDR retaliated and fired three bullets into Indian territory.

Major Shanmug of 29 Battalion said BDR protested the unprovoked firing of BSF and beamed up its patrol at different places following the incident.

BSF returned the body of a Bangladesh national Thursday afternoon, a correspondent from Thakurgaon reports.

Rashidul, 37, son of late Samsul Haque of Chandail under Haripur upazila in Thakurgaon, was gunned down by BSF personnel early Wednesday at Haripur.

The body was returned after a flag meeting of company commanders of BDR and BSF. BDR Deputy Commander Major Munir said.

Later, BDR handed the body over to the victim's family.

## Suspected US missile

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 local government official Iqbal Khattak told AFP.

Separately eight militants were killed when Pakistan army tanks and artillery targeted their positions in the Kausar and Rashakai areas earlier in the day, Khattak said.

Pakistani forces have for weeks been targeting militant positions in Bajaur, a major operation that has seen nearly 700 people killed, mostly militants, and 260,000 displaced.

Al Badar, backed by former guerrilla leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, has previously conducted operations against Afghan and international forces based across the border in Afghanistan, residents and a security official said.

Hekmatyar was briefly prime minister of Afghanistan in the 1990s after the end of its Soviet occupation.

He has backed the Taliban since the regime was removed from power following the US-led invasion of the country in 2001, after the September 11 attacks in the United States, and has demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces.

Missile strikes targeting militants in Pakistan in recent weeks have been blamed on US-led coalition forces or CIA drones based in Afghanistan. Pakistan does not have missile-equipped drones.

Thirty-eight people, including women and children, have been killed in the past week's missile attacks.

Pakistan and the United States have been drawn into a row over the

strikes, with Pakistan army chief General Ashfaq Kayani this week strongly criticising them and insisting no deal existed to